Support for Statewide Paid Family & Medical Leave Insurance Program

“Paid family and medical leave is a public health imperative”

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Newark, DE - Amidst an ongoing pandemic that has magnified the need to address systemic public health inequalities, today the Delaware Academy of Medicine - Delaware Public Health Association expresses support for passing a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program in the First State. The Academy/DPHA provides the following statement regarding a state paid family and medical leave program, which has been adopted in nine states and the District of Columbia:

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the fault lines in our public health infrastructure and economic systems and their impacts on Delawear's health and wellbeing. Balancing the needs of work and family are central to that struggle.

It is for these reasons and more that the Academy/DPHA believes a statewide Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program is a public health imperative, one that will strengthen Delaware's health infrastructure and enhance Delawareans' quality of life for years to come.

The health benefits of paid family and medical leave are well documented and wide-ranging. Newborns and new parents have much to gain from a statewide paid leave policy. New mothers who used paid leave report “fewer depressive symptoms, a reduction in severe depression, and, when the leave is paid, an improvement in overall and mental health.” ¹ Paid leave has been demonstrated to increase rates of breastfeeding, enable fathers to be more involved in childcare, and improve on-time vaccinations for newborns.² Furthermore, paid leave is associated with lower rates of

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mortality for infants and young children, a particularly important outcome considering Delaware’s high rate of infant mortality, especially among Black and Brown children.\(^3\) \(^4\) \(^5\)

As Delaware’s population ages, paid family and medical leave will be critical to caregivers and citizens across the state. Over the next twenty years, Delaware’s share of the population aged 65 and older will grow by over 10 percent.\(^6\) Increasing support and resources for family caregivers, who often act as the main care providers for aging family members and family members with disabilities, is essential to meeting Delaware’s increasing healthcare demands. California’s paid leave program, which has been in effect since 2002, was associated with an 11 percent decline in elderly nursing home usage, indicating that these types of supports make it possible for older generations to age in place.\(^7\) Enacting a statewide paid leave policy now will pay dividends in increasing Delaware’s caregiving capacity in the years ahead.

A statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program would address the stark inequities in access to paid leave. According to data assembled from the US Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, more than half (54%) of Delawareans do not even have access to unpaid leave under the Federal Medical Leave Act (FMLA) law, which provides for unpaid, job-protected leave.\(^8\) Among Delawareans who are covered by FMLA, many cannot afford to take unpaid time away from work if it means losing a paycheck. This is especially true for Black workers, 65 percent of whom are either ineligible for or cannot afford to take unpaid leave and 75 percent for Hispanic workers.\(^9\) From a health equity standpoint, paid leave is an essential pillar in the effort to increase access and improve outcomes for Delawareans of all backgrounds.

Paid family and medical leave is good public health policy. It lifts all boats and enhances health and well-being of Delawareans across the life course.

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\(^4\) Berger, Lawrence et al. “Maternity Leave, Early Maternal Employment and Child Health and Development in the US.” The Economic Journal
The Delaware Academy of Medicine, also known as the Academy/DPHA is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1930. Its mission is to enhance the well-being of the community through education and the promotion of public health.